NOVEMBER 30, 2020 BY JASON K. RESCH

What is the meaning of life?

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What is the meaning of life? It's a question everyone has wondered about at some point in their life. Is there even an answer?

Each of us has somehow found our way into this world. But for what purpose or reason are we here? What's the point of it all?

Is there inherent significance or value to life and existence?

Among the many philosophies and religions, we find no shortage of answers offered. But which answer is right? Does science suggest an answer to this mystery? If so, what does it tell us?

As we will see, science does give an answer to this question. One that is both remarkably simple, yet comprehensive and all encompassing.

Having an answer to this question enables us to better understand each other, to know the direction and aim of humanity and technology, and to know what is truly valuable so we can get the most out of life.

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Reviewing Answers

The question “*What is the meaning of life?*” has a long and rich history.

Let’s see what answers have been given by ancient civilizations, religions of the world, and philosophical traditions.

Answers from Ancients

Peoples in every time and place have considered this question. A few have left records of their thoughts that have survived to this day.

Let’s review the oldest of humanity’s answers to this ageless question.

Ancient Egyptians

Hieroglyphs of the *Pyramid Texts* in the pyramid at Saqqara

Perhaps the oldest of these records are the *Pyramid Texts* — inscribed in the tombs of ancient Egyptian kings some 4,400 years ago.

According to these texts, after death, one’s life is judged in a trial by Osiris and 42 judges in the *Hall of Two Truths*. During this trial one’s heart is weighed against a *feather of truth*.

If one led a virtuous life, their heart will be found lighter than the feather of truth and their soul is free to pass to the *Field of Reeds* where it will live forever in paradise. If the heart is heavier, it is eaten by the demoness *Ammit*, making the soul forever restless.

In the view of ancient Egyptians, the meaning of life is to live a life worthy of passing to the eternal joy of paradise. This requires a life of truth, justice, and harmony, avoiding chaos, violence, and evil.

Ancient Sumerians

Sumer was the first human civilization. It is also the first to develop written language. Humankind's oldest surviving work of literature, is the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, written in *Sumerian cuneiform* 4,100 years ago.

The story centers on the life of Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk.

A surviving tablet of the Epic of Gilgamesh. Image Credit: Wikipedia

This epic offers an answer to the question of the meaning of life.

> When the gods created man they allotted to him death, but life they retained in their own keeping. As for you, Gilgamesh, fill your belly with good things; day and night, night and day, dance and be merry, feast and rejoice. Let your clothes be fresh, bathe yourself in water, cherish the little child that holds your hand, and make your wife happy in your embrace; for this too is the lot of man.
>
> *— Siduri in "Epic of Gilgamesh" (2100 B.C.)*

In summary: life is short, so live it to the fullest. We find this advice echoed almost verbatim in the Old Testament book of *Ecclesiastes*:

> Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.
>
> *— Book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 9 verses 7-9* (450 – 200 B.C.)

Ancient Persians

The first monotheistic religion originated in ancient Persia 3,000 years ago. It is called *Zoroastrianism* and it's still practiced to this day.

Zoroastrianism was the official religion of the *First Persian Empire*.

The Tomb of *Cyrus the Great*, who established the First Persian Empire around 700 B.C.

By the fraction of people living in it, the Persian empire was the largest in human history, containing 30 to 50% of the world's population. It had a significant influence on civilizations and religions that followed.

According to Zoroastrianism, each person participates in the battle between *Asha* (good, truth, order) and *Druj* (evil, falsehood, decay).

One's *urvan* (soul) is sent to the material world to collect experiences — which are considered useful in the battle between good and evil.

Answers from Religion

Nearly every religion offers answers to the question of life's meaning. The few that don't at least provide a prescription for how to live.

Let's review answers found in some of the world's religions.

Abrahamic Religions

Abrahamic religions are those formed by descendants of Abraham. They include the religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Ceiling of the *Sagrada Família* in Barcelona, Spain. Image Credit: Wikipedia

Judaism

According to Judaism, the meaning of life is to heal, repair, and improve the state of the world through good deeds.

The final goal is a perfected *world to come*.

Christianity

According to Jesus, the most important law in life is to, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind and to love your neighbor as yourself.”

Mormonism, an offshoot of Christianity, teaches that the purpose of life is to gain experience, develop, and receive a fullness of joy.

Islam

According to Islam, life on Earth is a test that determines one’s closeness to God. Devotion is demonstrated in five ways: profession, prayer, fasting, charity, and pilgrimage. One will either inherit a final home close to God and his love in a paradise, or distant in a hell.

The Prophet Muhammad also expressed a form of the Golden Rule saying, “None of you [truly] believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.”

Dharmic Religions

The Dharmic religions are those originating in the Indian subcontinent and include Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism.

North Tower of the *Meenakshi Amman Temple* in Madurai, India. Image Credit: Wikimedia

Hinduism

According to Hinduism, there are four aims in life:

1. *Kāma* (*desire*): sensual pleasure, emotional fulfillment, aesthetic (arts, dance, music, nature) appreciation, enjoyment, love, affection
2. *Artha* (*means of living*): career, financial security, prosperity
3. *Dharma* (*duties*): virtue, moral values, ethics, non-violence, order
4. *Moksha* (*liberation*): freeing oneself from the cycle of reincarnation through enlightenment, self-knowledge, and self-realization

Pursuing each is considered essential so long as no aim is sacrificed.

Hindus believe spiritual development occurs across lifetimes, with the final goal being moksha — a liberation from the cycle of reincarnation known as *saṃsāra*. This is considered the final aim of all souls.

Buddhism

According to Buddhism, everything is a product of the mind. Therefore, resolving one's state of mind is the highest goal.

> Mind precedes all phenomena, mind matters most, everything is mind-made.
>
> *— Gautama Buddha in "The Dhammapada" (c. 500 B.C.)*

The aim of Buddhists is to follow the *Noble Eightfold Path* and thereby eliminate suffering and achieve *nirvana* — the highest happiness.

Sikhism

The word *sikh* means student. The primary aim for Sikhs is continuous learning and development — for the mind and body to flourish. In the words of the founder of Sikhism:

> Your soul, breath of life, mind and body shall blossom forth in lush profusion; this is the true purpose of life.
>
> *— Guru Nanak in page 47, line 19 of "Guru Granth Sahib" (1604)*

Sikhs believe every soul is of divine origin and on a path to develop its divine attributes. Ultimately all souls will merge with *The True One*.

> We shall merge into the One from whom we came. The True One is pervading each and every heart.
>
> *— Guru Nanak in page 20, line 5 of "Guru Granth Sahib" (1604)*

East Asian Religions

East Asian Religions include the traditional Chinese religions of Confucianism and Taoism, as well as the Japanese religion of Shinto.

In Shinto, Torii Gates mark the entrance to the sacred.

Confucianism

Confucianism teaches a code of ethics, based on *Five Constants*: (benevolence, justice, ritual, wisdom, integrity) and *Four Virtues*: (loyalty, devotion to family, self-control, morality).

Confucius believed these qualities create strong and content families, which in turn creates strong and content communities. The goal is a harmonious society where individuals make better choices, live prosperous and peaceful lives, and minimize suffering.

> We can realize the ultimate meaning of life in ordinary human existence.
>
> *— Tu Wei-Ming in "Confucian Thought" (1985)*

Confucius is also known for the earliest telling of a form of the Golden Rule, saying, "What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others."

Taoism

> There was something formless and perfect before the universe was born. It is serene. Empty. Solitary. Unchanging. Infinite. Eternally present. It is the mother of the universe.
>
> For lack of a better name, I call it the Tao.
>
> *— Laozi in chapter 25 of "Tao Te Ching" (c. 600 – 400 B.C.)*

Taoism rejects the ritual and strict social hierarchy of Confucianism in favor of spontaneity, individualism, and *going with the flow*.

The foundational text of Taoism is the *Tao Te Ching*. It teaches, "See the world as your self. Have faith in the way things are. Love the world as your self; then you can care for all things."

Taoists believe all things were originally *Tao* — the natural order of the universe — and that ultimately, all beings return to it:

> In the beginning was the Tao.
> All things issue from it;
> all things return to it.
>
> *— Laozi in chapter 52 of "Tao Te Ching" (c. 600 – 400 B.C.)*

Shinto

The Japanese religion of Shinto has no dogmas, scriptures, or founder.

Shinto means *the way of the kami*. Kami are divine spirits present throughout the natural world. Practitioners seek harmony with and blessings from the kami through offerings and prayers.

According to the author J. W. T. Mason, in Shinto the purpose of humanity is to be a "self-developing creative spirit on earth." We are the agents by which divine spirits develop greater forms.

> Shinto constantly implies through its influence on the Japanese people that the progress of mankind is the intent of divine spirit on earth. Life is purposive to Shinto: a purposive activity of divine spirit seeking new expression in spirit's own self-created material world. […] Earthly life, to Shinto, is a desired satisfaction for divine spirit; and is a divine actuality in all of its manifestations, good and bad, whereby spirit creates its objective expansion by its own earthly efforts. Divine spirit, ever seeking renewal of creation, ever trying to progress in its material environment and ever striving to develop versatility of action — such is the emphasis Shinto gives to life.
>
> *— J. W. T. Mason in "The Meaning of Shinto" (1935)*

Answers from Philosophy

Consideration of life's meaning has occupied the minds of history's greatest thinkers, from Plato to Einstein.

The Thinker in Auguste Rodin's sculpture *The Gates of Hell*. Image Credit: Wikipedia

Greek Philosophers

According to Plato's *The Republic* (375 B.C.) the purpose of life is the pursuit of knowledge of *The Idea of the Good*. Plato considered this ideal to be the source of all good things: knowledge, beauty, truth, justice.

Plato's student, Aristotle, believed the highest aim for humans is *eudaimonia* — a Greek word embodying happiness and well-being.

> What is the highest good in all matters of action? To the name, there is an almost complete agreement; for uneducated and educated alike call it happiness, and make happiness identical with the good life and successful living. They disagree, however, about the meaning of happiness.
>
> *— Aristotle in "Nicomachean Ethics" NE I.4 (340 B.C.)*

Aristotle recognized that happiness means different things to different people, and even to the same person in different times: “after sickness it is health, and in poverty it is wealth; while when they are impressed with the consciousness of their ignorance, they admire most those who say grand things that are above their comprehension.”

Raphael’s masterpiece *The School of Athens* depicts Plato and Aristotle at The Academy (1511)

Epicurus believed that intrinsically, pleasure is the only good and pain the only evil. He taught that the best life is free of fear and free of pain.

> When we say, then, that pleasure is the end and aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality, as we are understood to do by some through ignorance, prejudice, or willful misrepresentation. By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul.
>
> *— Epicurus in “Letter to Menoeceus” (c. 300 B.C.)*

Middle Ages

The 8th century Buddhist monk Śāntideva advocated an effort “to stop all the present and future pain and suffering of all sentient beings, and to bring about all present and future pleasure and happiness.”

The ruins of the Nalanda University, where Śāntideva taught. Image Credit: Wikipedia

Śāntideva wrote the Bodhicaryāvatāra, which is popular in Tibet to this day — the Dalai Lama called it his favorite religious work.

> I should dispel the misery of others
> Because it is suffering just like my own,
> And I should benefit others
> Because they are sentient beings, just like myself.
>
> *— Śāntideva in "Bodhicaryāvatāra" VIII. 94 (c. 700 A.D.)*

One of the great works of middle age philosophy is *Summa Theologica* (*Summary of Theology*) by the Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas. It remains a cornerstone of Catholic thought and teaching.

Aquinas wrote that perfect happiness cannot be found on Earth, and only comes with a future union with God, the *universal good*.

> It is impossible for any created good to constitute man's happiness. For happiness is the perfect good, which lulls the appetite altogether; else it would not be the last end, if something yet remained to be desired. Now the object of the will, i.e. of man's appetite, is the universal good; just as the object of the intellect is the universal true. Hence it is evident that naught can lull man's will, save the universal good.
>
> *— Thomas Aquinas in "Summa Theologica" (1485)*

Aquinas advocated that on earth man lead a life of virtue, which he defined as having "a good habit, productive of good works."

Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was marked by the introduction of the scientific method, and a rejection of absolute monarchies. In their place emerged *constitutional governments* with powers limited by law, supporting individual rights, liberty and religious freedom.

Liberalism

John Locke was one of the greatest influences behind this transition. He is considered the father of *classical liberalism* — the idea that protecting individual liberty and balancing the rights of individuals across society is the highest aim and mission of government.

Locke's writings influenced the founders of the United States.

John Trumbull's depiction of the *Declaration of Independence* (1819)

Thomas Jefferson considered Locke (together with Bacon and Newton) to be "the three greatest men that have ever lived."

In the *Declaration of Independence*, Jefferson quotes Locke almost verbatim when he wrote that men possess "unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

As Aristotle noticed millennia before, people have different conceptions of happiness. By ensuring individual liberty, each person is free to pursue happiness in the manner they see most fit.

Utilitarianism

The Enlightenment witnessed other rediscoveries of old ideas. Channeling Epicurus, the philosopher Jeremy Bentham wrote:

> Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand, the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne.
>
> *— Jeremy Bentham in "The Principles of Morals and Legislation" (1780)*

Bentham referred to the inherent value of either promoting happiness or avoiding unhappiness as *utility* — which he defined as:

> By utility is meant that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered: if that party be the community in general, then the happiness of the community: if a particular individual, then the happiness of that individual.

This view is called *utilitarianism*. It is the idea that the motivation behind all rightful action is based on maximizing utility.

Modern Times

Before Charles Darwin's 1859 publication of *On the Origin of the Species*, the appearance of life and order in nature could only be explained by the existence of some divine plan or design.

Modern philosophies seek meaning in life that arose naturally — *some might say accidentally* — without a divine purpose, reason or intention.

Ernst Haeckel's "Tree of Life" from *The Evolution of Man* (1879) depicts humanity emerging from simpler lifeforms, rather than a direct act of creation by God.

Nihilism

Friedrich Nietzsche believed that the idea that "God is dead" leads to *nihilism* — a denial that life has any meaning, purpose or value.

> A nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist. According to this view, our existence (action, suffering, willing, feeling) has no meaning
>
> *— Friedrich Nietzsche in "The Will to Power" (published in 1910)*

While nihilism rejects the value of life, *materialist* and *naturalist* philosophers reject only a purpose to life.

In Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion*, James Watson, the co-discoverer of DNA, embodied this view when he said, "I don't think we're *for* anything. We're just the products of evolution."

Many biologists now believe that if life has any inherent meaning, it rests solely in terms of the propagation and survival of genes.

Einstein, however, rejected the view that life is meaningless:

> What is the meaning of human life, or, for that matter, of the life of any creature? To know an answer to this question means to be religious. You ask: Does it make any sense, then, to pose this question? I answer: The man who regards his own life and that of his fellow creatures as meaningless is not merely unhappy but hardly fit for life.
>
> *— Albert Einstein in "Mein Weltbild (My World View)" (1934)*

Humanism

Defying Nietzsche's prediction, *humanism* is a non-religious philosophy that recognizes value and purpose in human existence.

> Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.
> [...]
> We aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence.
>
> — *The Third Humanist Manifesto (2003)*

Naturalistic Pantheism

Rather than see no meaning in the natural world, *naturalistic pantheism* finds meaning in all of it. It reveres all life everywhere, as well as the universe and environment that make life possible.

Naturalistic pantheism can be viewed as a broadening of humanism to bring respect for the rights and lives of all creatures.

Paul Harrison, who launched the *World Pantheistic Movement* in 1997, advocates an "Active respect and care for the rights of all humans and other living beings."

According to this view, the meaning of life is to care for and respect nature, the environment, and all forms of life.

Summary of Answers

On the question of the meaning of life, we've reviewed answers from ancient civilizations, world religions, and philosophical traditions.

We're left with a smattering of answers, with no clear consensus. But despite a lack of consensus, we have noticed common themes:

- **Live Virtuously:** The ancient Egyptians and Thomas Aquinas say we ought to live a virtuous life, with the promise of a happy and eternal afterlife. Confucianism says virtue leads to a happier and more peaceful life here on Earth. Hinduism considers it a duty (*dharma*).

- **Enjoy Life:** The ancient Sumerians say we should eat, drink, and be merry. The Hindus call this kāma, Aristotle called it happiness, Epicurus and Śāntideva called it pleasure. Liberalism recognized self-defined pursuits of happiness. Utilitarianism advocates maximizing happiness.
- **Reduce Suffering:** This is the primary objective in Buddhism, and also advocated by Śāntideva and Utilitarians. It is implicit in humanism and naturalistic pantheism, whose ethics say we must respect life.
- **Develop and Grow:** The ancient Persians said the purpose of life is to collect experiences for the fight of good versus evil. Plato said it is to gain knowledge of the good. The Mormons say it to gain experience and develop ourselves to experience the fullness of joy. Sikhism says life's purpose is to learn and for our soul to blossom forth in lush profusion. Confucianism says we can find meaning in ordinary human experience.
- **Improve the World:** Judaism says working to build a better world is the primary aim of life. Hinduism recognizes the importance of work (*artha*). The aim of Confucianism is to fashion a harmonious society. Shinto says humanity's purpose is to be a self-developing creative spirit on earth. Thomas Aquinas says on earth, our purpose is to be productive of good works. Naturalistic pantheism says to revere the natural environment.
- **Love Others:** Christianity says to love thy neighbor as yourself, Islam advocates charity and wishing for your brother what you wish for yourself. Confucius says what you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others. Taoism says to see and love the world as yourself. Humanism preaches aspiring to the greater good of humanity.
- **Divine Union:** Many religions say the final aim of life is to realize a oneness with God or to otherwise reunite or merge with God. Hindus call this moksha. Taoists say all things return to their source. Sikhs say we will merge into the One from whom we came. Thomas Aquinas says perfect happiness exists only in a union with God. Islam says happiness in the afterlife depends on one's proximity to God.

These purported *meanings of life* all sound like noble aims. But which, if any, is right? Could there be, as the Hindus say, multiple answers?

All these answers appear to dance around something more fundamental — a common theme. But what unifying principle connects them?

A Unifying Principle

At first glance, the many answers we've found to the question of life's meaning seem quite different. But stepping back, a clear view comes into focus, and we can *see the forest for the trees*.

Across every answer there is broad agreement on favoring certain paths: in choosing happiness over suffering, pleasure over pain, life over death, saving the world over destroying it, virtue over vice, truth over lies, justice over injustice, beauty over ugliness, order over chaos, proximity to God over distance from God.

All these preferences embody pursuit of *what is valued* — what we call *good*. We could say the meaning of life rests in maximizing good: good for oneself, good for others, and good for the world.

But from where does goodness originate? What makes one thing *good* and another *bad*? As it happens, there is an object in reality from which all goodness and badness derives. It is also the source of all meaning to all creatures. Without it, there would be no meaning at all.

The Origin of Good

The good is anything useful, valuable, or worthwhile to someone.

Under this definition we can find some good in any technology considered useful, in any item of value people spend money to acquire, or in any human endeavor considered worth doing.

For example, we can say a life saving medicine is useful, houses are valuable, and making art is worthwhile. Why are these things good?

A Supreme Good

2,360 years ago, Aristotle noticed something strange: if you repeatedly ask, *why is that thing good?*, it leads to a chain of questions and answers.

Oddly, this chain does not continue forever. It always ends at the same place: in something that *just is* good — a thing good for its own sake.

> Every art and every investigation, and likewise every practical pursuit or undertaking, seems to aim at some good: hence it has been well said that the Good is That at which all things aim. […]
>
> But as there are numerous pursuits and arts and sciences, it follows that their ends are correspondingly numerous: for instance, the end of the science of medicine is health, that of the art of shipbuilding a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of domestic economy wealth. […]
>
> If therefore among the ends at which our actions aim there be one which we will for its own sake, while we will the others only for the sake of this, and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (which would obviously result in a process ad infinitum, so that all desire would be futile and vain), it is clear that this one ultimate End must be the Good, and indeed the Supreme Good.
>
> *— Aristotle in "Nicomachean Ethics" (340 B.C.)*

What form does this *Supreme Good* take?

Tracking Down the Supreme Good

Let's try some examples. We can use the previous examples of medicine, houses, and art, but if Aristotle is right, it works starting from anything good. Try some of your own examples and see.

Example 1: Medicine

- Why is ***life-saving medicine*** good?
  - Because it saves people's lives.
- Why is ***saving people's lives*** good?
  - Because it allows them to live longer.
- Why is ***living longer*** good?
  - Because it allows them to have more experiences.
- Why is ***having more experiences*** good?
  - It just is.

Example 2: Housing

- Why are ***houses*** good?
  - Because they protect people from the elements.
- Why is ***protection from the elements*** good?
  - Because it keeps people comfortable and prevents sickness.
- Why is ***being comfortable and healthy*** good?
  - Because it provides for better experiences.
- Why is ***having better experiences*** good?
  - It just is.

Example 3: Art

- Why is ***making art*** good?
  - Because it leads to more art.
- Why is ***more art*** good?
  - Because it gives people novel perspectives, feelings, and thoughts.
- Why are ***novel perspectives, feelings, and thoughts*** good?
  - Because it creates more variety of experiences.
- Why is ***more variety of experiences*** good?
  - It just is.

The Supreme Good Found?

The dictionary defines *good* as a: “benefit or advantage to someone or something.” According to this definition, a good thing must not only provide some benefit, it must also provide a benefit *to someone*.

We confirmed this in our examples. Regardless of where we began, each case ends in a “just is” at the point of augmenting experience — thoughts, feelings, perceptions — in other words, *consciousness*.

Without *conscious beings*, there would be no *someones* to receive any benefit. No one would notice, never mind appreciate, any good thing. If not for *consciousness*, there could be no *good*.

If *conscious experience* is the source of value, what does that say of t*he Supreme Good*?

Might *conscious experience* be the foundation of all value? Is improving states of consciousness the source of all good and rightful action? Is harming consciousness the source of evil and immoral action?

Over the centuries, some philosophers have suspected that mind, sensations, or consciousness are the basis of all good and evil.

> For these words of Good, evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the Person of the man or, From the Person that representeth it;
>
> *— Thomas Hobbes in "Leviathan" (1651)*

> We have already observed, that moral distinctions depend entirely on certain peculiar sentiments of pain and pleasure, and that whatever mental quality in ourselves or others gives us a satisfaction, by the survey or reflection, is of course virtuous; as every thing of this nature, that gives uneasiness, is vicious.
>
> *— David Hume in "A Treatise of Human Nature" (1739)*

> It there appeared that we could not, on reflection, maintain anything to be intrinsically and ultimately good, except in so far as it entered into relation to consciousness of some kind and rendered good and desirable: and thus that the only ultimate Good, or End in itself, must be Goodness or Excellence of Conscious Life.
>
> *— Henry Sidgwick in "The Methods of Ethics" (1874)*

Ultimately, all value derives from conscious experience, for nothing can be felt, enjoyed, appreciated, thought, or known outside of it.

All Good Things

If all good is based on conscious experience, then improving and perfecting states of consciousness, and seeking desirable experiences constitute the meaning, purpose, and value of all conscious life.

But what does it mean to improve conscious experience?

If we discover how to best approach this Supreme Good, it would serve as a focus for all rightful action.

> Will not then a knowledge of this Supreme Good be also of great practical importance for the conduct of life? Will it not better enable us to attain our proper object, like archers having a target to aim at?
>
> *— Aristotle in "Nicomachean Ethics" (340 B.C.)*

It's hard to imagine any knowledge that could be more valuable.

Dimensions of Experience

> The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.
>
> *— Eleanor Roosevelt*

How many ways are there to improve conscious experience?

In our examples, we encountered three. Life saving medicine improved consciousness by extending life and allowing for more experiences. Having shelter increased the quality of experience. Creating art improved the variety of experiences.

Thus there are at least three ways consciousness can improve:

Three dimensions of experience by which consciousness can improve.

Quantity

"to live it"

One way to improve experience is to create more of them.

That is, to increase the number of experiences, have more of them, live longer, save lives, continue and propagate life, create and support the next and future generations.

As long as the experiences are positive, more is better than fewer. Thus, working to save and preserve life, and to protect the planet that sustains us, are seen as universal goals in service to a universal good.

Quality

“to taste experience to the utmost”

A second way to improve experience is to simply have better ones.

That is, to increase happiness, pleasure, satisfaction, and contentment, or to reduce suffering, pain, displeasure, and anguish.

> The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.
>
> *— John Stuart Mill* in *“Utilitarianism”* *(1863)*

Increasing happiness and reducing suffering are not only goals held by all, but are considered by some to be the very definition of good.

Variety

“*to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience*“

A third way to improve experience is to have new kinds of them.

That is, to have a wide breadth of experiences, try new things, explore new states of consciousness, learn, develop, grow, increase the ways of thinking, perceiving, and being, to promote a diversity of forms of conscious life, language, arts, culture, and expression.

> Variety’s the very spice of life,
> That gives it all its flavour.
>
> *— William Cowper* in *“The Task”* *(1785)*

Few desire lives of monotony or stagnation. Instead we seek lives of learning and growth, enriched by a diversity of experiences.

Knowing the Meaning of Life

All good comes from increasing the *quantity*, *quality*, and *variety* of life’s experiences. It is the source of all value and motive for all action.

> *It is the meaning of life.*

Great power comes from knowing this ultimate source of value.

Since all value derives from this, this knowledge tells us **what things are truly valuable** and worthy of pursuit, and which are not.

Since this universal value is the motivation behind all human action, this knowledge helps to **better understand and relate to** others.

Since it is the source of value behind every useful technology, this knowledge enables us to **predict where technology is headed**.

Since it is the goal of conscious life, this knowledge tells us of the **ultimate destiny of humanity**, or for that matter any intelligent race.

Since it is the supreme purpose, this knowledge enables us to live in a manner to get the most and **make the most out of our time** here.

What Things are Valuable?

To know what is valuable, is to know what is worthy of pursuing, protecting, or fighting for. It tells us how to best spend our limited time, money, and energy to achieve what's most important in life.

A field called *axiology* is dedicated to the study of value. It seeks to answer where it comes from and what makes anything valuable.

One of its lessons is that value comes in two forms:

1. *Intrinsic* value – things that are valuable for their own sake
2. *Instrumental value* – ways to achieve things with intrinsic value

Intrinsic Value

In his 1973 work *Ethics*, the philosopher William Frankena tried to list everything that has intrinsic value. The following is his list:

- Life, consciousness, and activity
- Health and strength
- Pleasures and satisfactions of all or certain kinds
- Happiness, beatitude, contentment, etc.
- Truth
- Knowledge and true opinion of various kinds, understanding, wisdom
- Beauty, harmony, proportion in objects contemplated
- Aesthetic experience
- Morally good dispositions or virtues
- Mutual affection, love, friendship, cooperation
- Just distribution of goods and evils
- Harmony and proportion in one's own life
- Power and experiences of achievement
- Self-expression
- Freedom
- Peace, security
- Adventure and novelty
- Good reputation, honor, esteem, etc.

All of these serve to improve one or more dimensions of experience:

All these values enhance at least one of the three dimensions of conscious experience.

But intrinsic values, and improvements to consciousness are not the only things we value. We also value the means to reach these ends.

> All desirable things are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.
>
> *— John Stuart Mill in "Utilitarianism" (1863)*

Such means are called *instrumentally valuable*, for they are *instrumental* to reaching some end goal which is valuable for itself.

Instrumental Value

Things like food, water, medicine, shelter, and fuel, are not the ends but a means. They serve the purpose of maintaining and supporting conscious life, and so are indirectly valuable to consciousness.

Everything we spend money on is, by definition, valuable. Image Credit: VisualEconomics

Most money is spent to meet the basic needs of life: food, clothing, shelter, healthcare. Living another day adds to the *quantity of experience*.

When money's left over after meeting basic needs, it can be spent to improve the *quality of experience* and *variety of experience*: on travel, art, education, entertainment, conveniences, dining, and electronics.

The Value of Life

Consciousness may be the ultimate source of value, but it is by no means the only thing of value. Some things contain either a future potential for consciousness, or play a supporting role for it.

Life on earth might have humbly begun in a tide pool like this.

For example, a planet harboring only unconscious single-celled life, or even just the necessary chemicals to later develop life, has value. It is valuable for its potential to develop and host conscious life.

If some misfortune prevented the rise of life on earth. It would represent an incalculable loss of value, for it would have prevented all the life and consciousness that otherwise would have emerged.

Unconscious life on earth is also valuable for its role in the greater ecosystem and food chain on which all conscious life depends.

Common Values

> Whether one believes in religion or not, whether one believes in this religion or that religion, we all are seeking something better in life.
>
> *— The 14th Dalai Lama* in *"The Art of Happiness" (1998)*

It sometimes seems no one can agree on anything. But if there is a universal goal — *improving conscious experience* — and if this goal is shared by all conscious life, why do people ever disagree on anything?

As we will see, disagreement stems not from disagreement on this universal value, but comes from different assumptions or priorities.

Different Assumptions

Knowing that all people fundamentally want the same thing can lead to a greater understanding of and compassion for others.

The Nun and the Reveler

It's hard to imagine a greater contrast than that between an *ascetic nun* and a *hedonistic reveler*. They seem to differ in their core values.

Here, the appearance of a difference in values is only an illusion.

Both the nun and reveler ultimately want the same thing out of life. Both seek to have maximum joy; to improve their *quality of experience*.

Where the nun and reveler differ is in their assumptions and strategies.

The reveler operates according to the assumption this may be the only life he gets. His strategy is to maximize pleasure in the here and now.

The nun believes if she lives a life of virtue and devotion to God on earth, she will be rewarded with eternal joy in the next life.

Both strategies are rational given their assumptions. Everyone desires better experiences. We disagree only on the best way to get them.

Planetary Survival

Everyone believes a planet full of life beats a dead or desolate world.

The more conscious life there is, and the longer such life survives in the universe, the greater total *quantity of experience* is created.

$$Experience = Population \times Time$$

Presently, we share one home. Maximizing the quantity of conscious experience requires a balance between maximizing the population and sustaining the environment over time.

The population of conscious beings, and the time conscious life inhabits earth contribute equally to *total experience*.

While everyone agrees with the value of maximizing *quantity of experience*, people disagree on the best strategy for getting there.

Some think the best course is to plan for the long haul, and maximize the time component of the equation while keeping the population at a size that minimizes environmental, or other catastrophic risks.

Others argue maximizing population is better, as we cannot know how future technologies will alter the situation, nor can we know if or when a global catastrophe might wipe out human civilization.

Life on earth faces an array of threats, including: nuclear war, impact events, environmental destruction, overpopulation, crop failure, climate change, cyberterrorism, bioterrorism, pandemics, hostile artificial intelligence, super volcanoes, and gamma ray bursts.

Whether we maintain a population of 1 billion humans that lasts another 1,000 years or 10 billion humans that makes it only another 100, both yield a net gain of a trillion years of human experience.

Given technological trends, it is likely that emerging technologies like mind uploading, space migration, and nanotechnology, will upend long-term predictions and alter the calculus of the optimum strategy. (See: "*What are the limits to population growth?*" and "*Can aging be cured?*")

Much like the nun and reveler, all agree on maximizing life and experience. The disagreement is only on what's the best strategy.

Different Priorities

Other cases of disagreement occur not from a difference of assumptions or opinions on best strategies, but from a different prioritization of the three dimensions of experience.

Everyone finds value in greater quantity, quality, and variety of experience. But what happens when one comes at the cost of another?

Risk versus Reward

Different personality traits result from different priorities for the dimensions of experience. Risk takers and adrenaline junkies, for example, prioritize *quality of experience* over *quantity of experience*.

They'll risk life and limb for more intense and varied experiences.

What dimension of experience do you prioritize in life?

Different priorities reveal themselves in perennial debates: freedom vs. safety, quantity vs. quality of life, the new vs. the familiar.

Others, who prioritize *quantity of experience*, we may call risk averse. They consider skydiving or mountain climbing too risky to ever try.

Of course, there is also risk in being too risk averse, and it is grave: you could die without ever having truly lived.

No Pain, No Gain

To have only pleasurable experiences comes at the cost of knowing the full richness and depth of possible experiences. It represents a prioritization of *quality of experience* over *variety of experience*.

Vincent van Gogh created *The Starry Night* amidst great emotional torment.

The idea of tortured artists implies certain art requires suffering. If true, then their sacrifice trades *quality of experience* to yield a greater *variety of experience* for everyone who appreciates their art.

> But perhaps it’s good for one to suffer. Perhaps it’s unavoidable and necessary. Perhaps I ought to thank you. Can an artist do anything if he’s happy? Would he ever want to do anything? What is art, after all, but a protest against the horrible inclemency of life?
>
> *— Aldous Huxley in “Antic Hay” (1923)*

Any time we venture to try something new, we make this trade-off. When we try a new food, we risk finding it distasteful. But it could also become our new favorite. This is the importance of trying new things.

To know suffering is to have a basis of compassion for others. Could we know the plight of the hungry if we’ve never gone without? Could we understand how the sick feel if we’ve never ourselves been ill?

The Direction of Technology

Where is technology headed? Where are we going as a species?

It is impossible to predict future technologies without understanding the motivations that steer the direction of technological development.

How might our future look? Image Credit: Dylan Cole

To know the universal source of value is to know what all sentient creatures want. To understand that technology serves the needs of conscious experience allows us to glean information about the future direction of technology and contemplate its ultimate end.

While we can’t predict the *how* of these future technologies, we can predict their *why*. It will be the same *why* behind every technology: to improve the *quantity*, *quality*, and *variety* of conscious experience.

Ultimately, technology is about gaining better control over our own experiences. Better technologies provide greater power over the kinds of conscious experiences we can create, enjoy, and share.

Mastering Experience

The technology of painting was perhaps our first step to control the inputs to our senses, and thereby gain some mastery of consciousness.

The Cave of Altamira paintings are 36,000 years old, 8 times the age of the Pyramids of Giza.

Across eons, the artist behind this painting is affecting the inputs to your senses and altering your present conscious experience.

While artists endeavor to create new experiences for the perceiver, inventors seek out more powerful methods for the artist. Early pigments provided some control over inputs to the eyes and primitive musical instruments enabled novel experiences for the ears.

Is the ultimate end of technology to become masters of our own conscious experience?

Our first technologies were pitiful: we had limited color palettes of only a few tones, and instruments that played only a few notes.

But with time, we developed techniques for universality: projectors that could display any image, and speakers that could emit any sound.

Fidelity improved to the point of *high definition* — where our senses can no longer perceive higher quality audio or higher pixel counts.

Virtual reality technology can now achieve *immersion*, where one's senses are fooled so thoroughly the brain feels like it's somewhere else.

Nova 360 Degree Motion Virtual Reality Simulator
NOVA
360°
VR

State of the art virtual reality simulators manipulate visual, aural, tactile, and balance senses. Prototype technologies are in development to control sensations of taste and smell.

We're presently on the verge of mastering our senses. Complete mastery will allow us to perceive any imaginable experience.

Should we get there, what form might this technology take?

The *holodeck* of science fiction is a technology able to simulate any imaginable environment.

Compared to what's been imagined, today's VR technology is limited.

We have to put ourselves in harnesses and *omnidirectional treadmills* to simulate an experience as mundane as walking. To simulate g-forces requires we toss and turn our bodies around. But there's a better way.

> The Vertebrane system installs shunts into every nerve pathway connecting to your brain. That happens both with sensory nerve fibers heading toward the brain and with a muscle control fibers heading out. Then the Vertebrane system can disconnect your brain from your biological body and connect it to an in-game body in a completely natural and realistic way. Your virtual in-game body *is* your body as far as your brain is concerned, and your immersion in the game is complete.
>
> *— Marshall Brain in "The Day You Discard Your Body" (2005)*

A computer-linked neural integration could generate any sensation.

You could feel any acceleration, even weightlessness. You could in the virtual reality, jump in the ocean and feel both cold and wet. You could taste, smell and have the experience of swallowing food in VR, and moreover, you could feel full and satisfied afterwards.

Cypher enjoys a simulated meal in *The Matrix* (1999)

Science has made some initial progress with this technology. For example, artificial retinas and bionic limbs can integrate with the nervous system allowing the blind to see and the lame to walk.

> As soon as I put my foot on, it took me about 10 minutes to get control of it. I could stand up and just walk away. […] I couldn't explain it. It was like, I was moving it with my muscles, there was nobody else doing it, the foot was not doing it, I was doing it, so it was really strange and overwhelming.
>
> *— Gummi Olafsson in interview (2015)*

Elon Musk's company Neuralink seeks to commercialize technologies of brain-computer interfaces. Such interfaces will one day make it possible to have any sensory experience we want — in effect we'll have the power to create and enter any reality of our choosing.

Such technology is as powerful as the holodecks of science fiction.

Sharing Experiences

Today, YouTube is seen as simply a site for hosting videos. But as our technology to record and control sensory experience advances, sites like YouTube will become *Libraries of Experiences*.

People will have access not just to videos, but complete sensory experiences: dream vacations, trips to the space station, dining at top restaurants, riding roller coasters, flying in wingsuits, *anything*.

Paragliding near the Himalayas in 360 / VR (Royal Mountain Travel Nepal)
360°
VR 4K

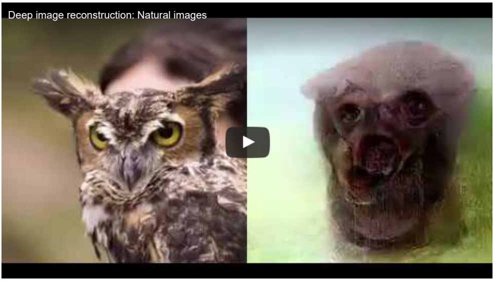
Ever wanted to paraglide? This is one of an increasing number of 360-degree virtual reality videos now hosted on YouTube. If you don't have a VR headset you can use your mouse to look around. Wait until they add g-forces and the feeling of wind in your ears.

Today we carry around little recording devices that can capture the experiences of sight and sound and then share them to the world.

In the future, we could use technologies that directly record our own brain activity, and generate shareable files of our own experiences.

It sounds far-fetched, but scientists in Japan have already used brain scanning technology, coupled with AI, to read the content of dreams and extract visual information directly from a subject's brain.

The ability to record and share experiences will change everything.



Left: test images shown to subjects. Right: reconstructed images from brain scans.

Today, tens of millions of dollars are spent to make a Hollywood film, but anyone can see it for the price of a movie ticket. This model is economical precisely because the experience of seeing a movie can be copied and shared at a low cost.

Imagine if the experience of a perfect vacation, or a perfectly prepared meal could be as easily downloaded, enjoyed, and shared.

In such a future, tens of millions of dollars might be spent to create the perfect vacation experience, and moreover, anyone could access it from the comfort of their living room for the price of a movie ticket.

In such a future we might spend a large fraction of our time creating, recording, searching for, discovering, sharing and enjoying content, living in a virtual reality of ideas and experiences.

Perhaps such a life is not so different from how people live today.

Explorers of Consciousness

When technology has rid the world of suffering, disease, and death, what then? What will it all be for, once the struggle to survive is gone?

How will we spend our time?

When everyone has as much *quantity of experience* as they want, the remaining focus will be on the *quality* and *variety* of experience.

Artists, storytellers, and content creators of all kinds will design and share new sensory experiences. They will write and share compelling stories, and you will be able to live the lives of any of the characters.

If technology cures mortality, we could live for millions of years. Then downloading and experiencing a 70-year lifetime represents the same time investment as a 30 minute TV episode. For all you know, your life could be such an experience, one found in a *Library of Experience*s. (See: "*Are we living in a computer simulation?*")

In the short story *A Conversation*, a member of an advanced alien civilization explains what life is like where he comes from:

> We live in the Realm of Possibilities. Here, *anything is possible*. Anything we can imagine, we can make real, almost effortlessly. So in a sense, we are exploring a *universe of imagination*, which is much more vast than any physical universe. […] And this is what we explore most of all: We are exploring the *potentiality of consciousness*.
>
> *— Douglas S. Jones in "A Conversation" (1996)*

All conscious life is motivated by pursuit of the Supreme Good. Predictions for the future of technology apply as well to aliens or conscious artificial intelligences as it does to humans.

When it comes to exploring the infinite potentiality of possibility, imagination and creativity become the chief commodity.

> I am enough of the artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.
>
> *— Albert Einstein in "What Life Means to Einstein" (1929)*

For such advanced civilizations, imagination rather than physical observation, becomes the primary source of knowledge. For imagination enables creation of new conscious experiences — representing new ways to know, feel, realize, perceive, sense, and be.

Travelling across the physical universe takes time and there's also no guarantee you'll find anything of interest once you arrive. If we do travel through space, we may spend all of our time in "holodecks", just as travelers on planes occupy themselves with screens or books.

Rather than explore outer-space, our attention would turn inward, to the infinitely richer possibilities that exist in *inner-space*.

We would become *psychonauts* — explorers of consciousness itself.

Humanity's Final Destiny

> As a working hypothesis to explain the riddle of our existence, I propose that our universe is the most interesting of all possible universes, and our fate as human beings is to make it so.
>
> *— Freeman Dyson in "Infinite in all Directions" (1988)*

The field of *eschatology* is concerned with the final events of history and the last destiny of humankind. If we know the direction of future progress, can we guess where history might be when it ends?

The Omega Point

In the 1930s, the Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote in *The Phenomenon of Man* that humanity, and the universe itself appears to be evolving towards a point of maximum consciousness and creativity.

> We have seen and admitted that evolution is an ascent towards consciousness. That is no longer contested even by the most materialistic, or at all events by the most agnostic of humanitarians. Therefore it should culminate forwards in some sort of supreme consciousness.
>
> *— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in "The Phenomenon of Man" (1955)*

Teilhard de Chardin called this supreme consciousness, this culmination of evolution, the *Omega Point*.

Similar conclusions have been reached by technologists and physicists:

> Evolution moves toward greater complexity, greater elegance, greater knowledge, greater intelligence, greater beauty, greater creativity, greater love. And God has been called all these things, only without any limitation: infinite knowledge, infinite intelligence, infinite beauty, infinite creativity, and infinite love. Evolution does not achieve an infinite level, but as it explodes exponentially, it certainly moves in that direction. So evolution moves inexorably toward our conception of God, albeit never reaching this ideal.
>
> *— Futurist and inventor Ray Kurzweil in "The Singularity is Near" (2005)*

> In the final anthropic principle or if anything like an infinite amount of computation taking place is going to be true, which I think is highly plausible one way or another, then the universe is heading towards something that might be called omniscience.
>
> *— Quantum physicist David Deutsch in "The anthropic universe" (2006)*

Earth is a system for turning sunlight into conscious experiences. Albeit an inefficient one.

In its present form, this system is extremely wasteful. Only two parts in a billion of the sun's light reaches Earth. Of the light that gets here, less than 2% is captured by plants. Of the energy captured by plants, even when eaten by humans, only a fifth goes to power the brain.

Future technologies could be much more efficient.

They could recruit ever larger fractions of the matter and energy of the universe towards the production of conscious experience. What is now dead matter will become alive with meaning.

> Competitive success will depend more and more on using already available matter and space in ever more refined and useful forms. The process, analogous to the miniaturization that makes today's computers a trillion times more powerful than the mechanical calculators of the past, will gradually transform all activity from grossly physical homesteading of raw nature, to minimum-energy quantum transactions of computation. The final frontier will be urbanized, ultimately into an arena where every bit of activity is a meaningful computation: the inhabited portion of the universe will [be] transformed into a cyberspace.
>
> *— Hans Moravec in "Pigs in Cyberspace" (1992)*

At the physical limits of computation, one kilogram of matter, appropriately arranged, can perform 10^{50} operations per second. The human brain is estimated to be capable of 10^{18} operations per second.

This means a 1-kilogram mass arranged into the perfect computer, could in one second, simulate 10^{32} seconds (or a trillion trillion years) of human brain activity. This vastly exceeds the total of all experiences had by all humans who have ever lived. (See: "*How good can technology get?*")

Should technology ever approach these physical limits of computation we could imagine a single entity that could possess in its memory, trillions of planetary civilizations worth of experience.

Creating such an entity may be the destiny of mankind, or more generally, that of any evolutionary process allowed to master and expand consciousness towards its ultimate limits.

> Any cosmology with progress to infinity will necessarily end in God.
>
> *— Physicist Frank Tipler in "The Physics of Immortality" (1994)*

Salvador Dalí was fascinated by Teilhard de Chardin’s Omega Point theory, which partly inspired his 1960 masterpiece “The Ecumenical Council” which shows souls returning to God.

The idea of a final supreme consciousness, perhaps containing the lives, memories and experiences of all beings is reminiscent of the concept of returning to or merging with God as described in Taoism and Sikhism, as well as the writings of Thomas Aquinas.

> Now we’re trying to figure out a way to reconverge science and spirituality into this realization that there’s something about life, there’s something about this universe, that is taking us to higher more sublime levels.
>
> *— John M. Smart in “A.I., Inner Space, and Accelerating Change” (2013)*

The End of the Universe

> When the first living thing existed, I was there waiting. When the last living thing dies, my job will be finished. I’ll put the chairs on the tables, turn out the lights and lock the universe behind me when I leave.
>
> *— Neil Gaiman in “The Sandman: Dream Country” (1991)*

Should the universe one day end, or the last living thing die, does that mean it was all for nothing? Does an end render all good meaningless?

Some day, 10^{100} years from now, the last black hole will evaporate in a shower of subatomic particles. Will all of existence have been for naught? Image Credit: Timelapse of the future

A common refrain in nihilism is that existence is meaningless because one day the universe will end. (See: "*How will the world end?*")

But this reasoning doesn't hold up to scrutiny.

Such logic would lead one to say there's no point in taking a good job because one day you will quit. The value of the job rests in the pleasures and paychecks along the way, not in the final end.

Similarly, the value of conscious life rests in the experiences enjoyed, felt, and created along the way, whether or not they may one day be forgotten. In the moment, the dinner you enjoyed 1,493 days ago was in no way diminished by the fact you would eventually forget it.

Likewise, the value of your life is not diminished by the final fate of the universe, whatever it might be.

> These events will take tens of billions of years or more. Human beings, or our descendants, whoever they might be, can do a great deal of good in tens of billions of years before the cosmos dies.
>
> *— Carl Sagan in Cosmos episode 10 "The Edge of Forever" (1980)*

Moreover, the idea that time passes and the past moments cease to exist is only an illusion according to the physical understanding of time given by Einstein's relativity. (See: "*What is time?*")

There are even some reasons to believe that life can survive the end of the universe. (See: "*Can life survive beyond the end of the universe?*")

Making the Most of Life

What good is knowledge if it cannot be applied? What good is knowing the meaning of life if it doesn't tell us how to live?

> All our philosophy is dry as dust if it is not immediately translated into some act of living service.
>
> *— Mahatma Gandhi in "The Diary of Mahadev Desai" (1932)*

If conscious experience is the source of value, then the purpose of life lies in maximizing that value — in maximizing conscious experience.

But how ought we direct ourselves to maximize this value? How do we have the greatest impact on improving conscious experience?

The Path to Happiness

In 1854, the economist Hermann Heinrich Gossen developed the *law of diminishing marginal utility*. It is the idea that one gets less incremental value from something the more of that thing someone has.

For example, if someone has no car, gaining one makes a big difference to them. But if someone has 10 cars, getting an 11th won't add as much value to their life. Though Gossen formulated it in mathematical terms, this basic idea has long been understood:

> Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.
>
> *— John the Baptist in "Luke 3:11" (85 A.D.)*

While value diminishes as one person accumulates an excess, the reverse is also true. When someone with an excess shares with those who have less, then total value increases.

This is because sharing an extra shirt with a person who had none helps them more than the person giving up an extra shirt loses.

In *The Art of Happiness*, the Dali Lama said, "I believe that the very purpose of our life is to seek happiness." While happiness is the goal, he concluded the best way to achieve it was through helping others.

Is serving others the truest source of happiness?

> I believe that the proper utilization of time is this: if you can, serve other people, other sentient beings. If not, at least refrain from harming them.
>
> *— The 14th Dalai Lama in "The Art of Happiness" (1998)*

The search for the most effective and efficient manners of helping others has recently become a science, called *effective altruism*. It aims to find interventions with the greatest return in terms of benefit to others.

Love

> When both myself and others
> Are similar in that we wish to be happy,
> What is so special about me?
> Why do I strive for my happiness alone?
>
> *— Śāntideva in "Bodhicaryāvatāra" VIII. 95 (c. 700 A.D.)*

We identified the meaning of life with pursuit of the *Supreme Good*.

The value of the Supreme Good comes from consciousness itself: all positive value derives from benefits to conscious experience. Either in having more experiences, better quality experiences, or a greater variety of experiences. But good is not limited to helping oneself.

> Happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself.
>
> *— Viktor Frankl in "Man's Search for Meaning" (1946)*

From this we can conclude that ultimate meaning and purpose may be found in acts of service which benefit of others. To pursue the Supreme Good is to seek good for all conscious beings.

Moreover, experiences are most meaningful when they are shared.

Love is helping others enjoy the full richness of life.

To make the most of life, seek the good for all: good for oneself, good for others, and good for the world. Seek to benefit all conscious beings and attempt to maximize the richness of life.

Boiled down to one word, the meaning of life is *love*.

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Published by Jason K. Resch

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27 Replies to “What is the meaning of life?”

spudboy100@aol.com
December 3, 2020 at 7:42 pm

I suspect that the purpose of our species is diff than the purpose of each of our lives. The purpose of our species is probably to build machine intelligences to reformulate, or quicken, the Milky Way galaxy and beyond. For our own purpose, it's possible that's it's to assist somebody else. I have zero ideas on who or how, it simply seems emotionally that it's true. Maybe just one person, but possibly more than one I guess. On God (You know he doesn't like to be called that!), I'd go with the Boltzmann Brain conjecture because it makes sense, in a cause and effect way. It was upgraded about 20 years ago, as a speculation, by physicists Andreas Albrecht and Leonard Susskind in a couple of papers each of the did.

LOG IN TO REPLY

Jason K. Resch

December 6, 2020 at 2:13 pm

Hi Mitch,

I agree that as it pertains to the direct and immediate purposes, there are often differences between the individual and civilization aims. However, when it comes to the ultimate goal (to pursue and realize more states of consciousness), are they different?

I am very interested and curious now to read the papers by Albrecht and Susskind that you reference. Do you happen to recall their titles?

Jason

LOG IN TO REPLY

Abdullah

December 20, 2020 at 6:41 am

Thank you for writing this
Really thank you

LOG IN TO REPLY

Jason K. Resch

December 20, 2020 at 1:44 pm

Hi Abdullah,

You're most welcome!

LOG IN TO REPLY

Semih BULGUR

January 28, 2021 at 7:52 pm

One more great job from you! Thank for your pen and knowledges! Very long article but it is not boring. You have chosen very hard and comprehensive topic. Like what is the happiness? What is the meaning of life? The answer is larger than life! Maybe the meaning of life is get the reward of your hard work! But l have still some questions with out answer! Thank you indeed. Looking for your new articles.

LOG IN TO REPLY

Jason K. Resch

January 31, 2021 at 1:09 pm

Hi Semih, thank you! I am working on another big one now. It should be out shortly.

LOG IN TO REPLY

Semih BULGUR

February 4, 2021 at 2:06 am

l appreciate reading new one. Thank you.

LOG IN TO REPLY

King

February 4, 2021 at 5:20 pm

Really dip. is the new article out yet??? This one was really helpful. Synchronizes with everything human. Thank you.

LOG IN TO REPLY

Jason K. Resch

February 5, 2021 at 1:29 pm

Hi King,

Thank you. I am busily working on the next article, but it is a big one and is taking some time. If you want to know as soon as it is available, you can subscribe to the e-mail list. Then you will be notified whenever new articles are published. Take care.

LOG IN TO REPLY

Semih BULGUR

February 9, 2021 at 12:53 am

Hi Jason,
l really appriciate if you let me take some quotes of your article. Thanks and regards.

LOG IN TO REPLY

Jason K. Resch

February 9, 2021 at 9:01 am

Hi Semih,

Sure thing. You’re welcome to quote the article.

LOG IN TO REPLY

Anundu David Terna

April 18, 2021 at 6:57 am

The research is apt. Thank you for providing it for public consumption.

LOG IN TO REPLY

Jason K. Resch

April 19, 2021 at 11:40 am

Hi Anundu, thank you! I am glad you liked it.

LOG IN TO REPLY

Andres Pimienta

May 31, 2021 at 10:15 am

Hi Jason,

Thanks for sharing your knowledge and your researches with the Web! While I share most of your thesis and your analysis, I have found other views on the online book Anandayana, which goes in details and technical explanations of some of topics discussed on your webpage. Have you read it? if so, what's your opinion about it

LOG IN TO REPLY

Jason K. Resch

June 10, 2021 at 11:22 pm

Hi Andres,

You're most welcome! I'm glad you enjoyed it. I was not familiar with that book, I appreciate you sharing it with me. I'll check it out. Thank you!

LOG IN TO REPLY

Ezbon

June 8, 2021 at 4:27 am

It's super

LOG IN TO REPLY

Jason K. Resch

June 8, 2021 at 1:51 pm

Hi Ezbon, thank you!

LOG IN TO REPLY

Ron Hooft

June 10, 2021 at 8:34 pm

As always, great detailed stuff.

Morality is about self interest. What is the meaning of life? Problem solving. In all we do, we gather, process, and pass on information to be gathered and processed and passed on again. Even in procreation. Survival means meeting needs. Everything/everyone has needs. Most are common. But desires are treated as needs as well. We all have slightly to vastly different wills. Interaction can cause conflicts. A resolution is demanded.

It is in our personal best interest to keep the peace. It's also in everyone elses best interest. We all have the same basic needs: We want freedom, security and prosperity. We can't have any of that if we're constantly at war with each other. So problem solving is the key to the best life we can have.

If others feel oppressed, theirs trouble ahead. Giving people the right to be who they are, be it male, female, black, white, gay, straight trans or what ever, calms things down and makes more people happy, except those who believe they have the force others to do things the way want.

Well, they can do things the way they want, but they have no right to tell others how to feel or act, as long as those personal actions don't harm others. That's the price of freedom. You give up the right to take it away from others. It's a trade off. I let you be you, you let me be me.

When inventing something, everything has to already be in place. You can't invent a phone unless someone invents wires, a speaker a microphone and discovers electricity etc. Once all is in place plus the desire for it, it practically invents itself. So it was with the phone; invented independantly around the world by at least 4 people within days of each other. Bell wasn't the first. Only the first to patent it.

So everything is built on the backs of others that came before. Thus we gather, process and pass on information. The meaning of life is conflict resolution.

LOG IN TO REPLY

Jason K. Resch

June 10, 2021 at 11:44 pm

Hi Ron,

Thank you! I must say it's an honor to have one of the founders of the World Pantheistic Movement comment on this article.

I largely agree with your opinion on morality. I would say that ultimately morality of an action derives from the collective interests (utility) of individuals who suffer or benefit as a result of said action. It's also a utilitarian viewpoint that can be difficult to implement in practice, which may explain why we often have to make do with heuristic rules.

I think you raise a valid point regarding the inevitably of technological inventions and progession. I have come to view technological advances almost as a force of nature, operating beyond our direction and control.

LOG IN TO REPLY

Dinesh
June 24, 2021 at 6:07 am

Thank you for information

LOG IN TO REPLY

Jason K. Resch
June 25, 2021 at 12:40 pm

Hi Dinesh,

I am glad you liked it!

LOG IN TO REPLY

Muhammad Hizbullah
October 28, 2021 at 3:42 pm

Very informative and helpful. Thanks for sharing.

LOG IN TO REPLY

Jason K. Resch
January 28, 2022 at 6:58 am

Hi Muhammad Hizbullah,

Thank you! I am glad you appreciated the article. 🙂

LOG IN TO REPLY

Guilherme Monteiro Jr.
April 12, 2022 at 2:04 pm

“If the salvation of Christianity is as unjust as the salvation of capitalism. Then we can say that the salvation of atheism, antitheism, skepticism, scientism, nihilism, materialism, positivism and neopositivism are as unjust and as cruel as the salvation of anarcho-capitalism and the salvation from Ayn Rand’s objectivism.”

“Internet atheists, Internet antitheists, Internet skeptics, Internet scientificists, Internet neopositivists, Internet rationalists, Internet free thinkers, Internet debunkers, Internet evidentialists, Internet secularists, Internet humanists, Internet irreligious, and Internet materialists prove that we can also have fanaticism, fundamentalism, totalitarianism, fascism and extremism within atheism, antitheism, skepticism, scientism, neopositivism, rationalism, freethought, debunking, evidentialism, secularism, humanism, irreligion, and materialism."

"There's no other species of gods Mounter. They are all cultural representations of the same universal powers we call Anunnaki. It's like different faces of same coins." – Kasdeya

"And yeah Mounter. Fuck popular culture and their bullshit media. They are trying to put the world against us. Because they are scared. They do not want us and the gods to take our rightful planet again, the whole universe is Anunnaki. And yes Mounter, they are already being punished and we are already being punished. Everyone is living in this prison. Here is the prison. And you should know this better." – Kasdeya

"Do not trust mass media Mounter. I know you understand why you shouldn't trust 100% on mass media, same way in those "scientific studies" and in those articles mass media, Google and the Internet always like to put in the top 3 results. You shouldn't trust on Quora answers and on Reddit answers as well. And you know it and I know you know it even better than me." – Kasdeya

"I like being a harsh critic of atheism, antitheism, skepticism, scientism, neopositivism, rationalism, freethought, debunking, evidentialism, secularism, humanism, irreligion, and materialism. It is something very necessary nowadays, and people should be able to do such things nowadays. And I like being like that, despite most of the hate I have got by a lot of people on the internet. And the main reason I became like that are because of Internet atheists, Internet antitheists, Internet skeptics, Internet scientificists, Internet neopositivists, Internet rationalists, Internet free thinkers, Internet debunkers, Internet evidentialists, Internet secularists, Internet humanists, Internet irreligious, and Internet materialists."

"I can say I am also a theorist of freethought. And I have showed it is possible to have religious freethought and spiritual freethought, same for religious critical thinking, spiritual critical thinking, religious thinking and spiritual thinking. It is just a matter of relativism and postmodernism. And yes, freethought and critical thinking are not necessarily materialistic and atheistic."

"Scientific limitationism shows that science has limits and limitations and people should understand the limits and limitations of science. That is the why I support the so called spiritual sciences."

"I have wrote so many quotes and so many criticisms. That I bet it is possible to make a massive and long work about everything I have done and wrote on the Internet. Mainly the things I archived or others archived as well."

"How I would like if humans were a species of gods and of highly evolved beings and they could have the same living standards and the same level of existence than An's Heaven… Sadly humans are far from that and they prefer to demonize and make propaganda against the Anunnaki and against the gods just because they are scared and they do not want the Anunnaki and the gods on Earth when they are right here and right now."

"I love my mother, she is everything for me, despite sometimes I disagree with her on a lot. I still love her and I seriously hope she will be able to understand me in the future and that she will live until I be able to live alone and able to take care of myself alone…”

“There are so many atheists, antitheists and skeptics who write a lot of bashing and hate towards me on the Internet, but I do not care about them. Actually, I do not even care about reading what they have wrote about me.”

“Wikipedia is biased favorable to antitheism and Wikipedia is biased against antiatheism. Same way for Google, Quora, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, VK and Reddit.”

“I love my personal life and I love my physical city and my physical metropolitan area, and I hope I will be able to enjoy that for the next 10-20 years from now.”

“After seeing the Putin’s madness related to wanting a nuclear war. I am seriously against nuclear war and I support that we must fight for the creation of the World Socialist Republic (or the Communist Federation of Earth) or even of the Anunna Imperial Authority of Ki (or the Anunna Empire of Ki) for avoid the nuclear war, even if it leads into a partial collapse of our modern civilization. Same thing for what Putin did with Bucha and is doing with Mariupol… It also affected me so hard…”

“Unbelievers and irreligious, including atheists, antitheists, skeptics, scientificists, humanists, neopositivists and such, are also believers and religious. Atheism, antitheism, skepticism, scientism, neopositivism, rationalism, freethought, debunking, evidentialism, secularism, humanism, irreligion, materialism and related are also ideologies and belief systems. Depending of how you see it. It is the same thing with apolitical being political, aphilosophical being philosophical, and aideological being ideological.”

“Science is also an ideology, a religion and a belief system. And the Internet, the mass media, several Journals, and the so called “science popularizers” and “science communicators” show that very well. And people should be able to realize that well.”

“I still remember so well the words of my Anunnaki father, Dingir Anu, saying that religion doesn’t matter and is a social construction and that you should know better than this. And saying that I never learn even if I am told same thing 100 times. And Anu has been saying that to me since that time of June/July 2021. That’s why tthr Anunnas don’t talk to you anymore. Your mind is stuck in unawareness. In my darkest times I should try to remember my best if and how I feel, what I fight for… And they would like me to drop politics all together. They want me to make a choice… Either them or politics… And it’s hard… And they also said everything is a social construction, everything that is made or created by humans is a social construction. Human interpretations of the world and human understanding of everything are social constructions. Even science is a social construction, and I need to remember that. That is what Anu wanted to say with the whole “become agnostic” and “become a normal human”… Still well I was finally able to understand that.”

“The so-called “scientific dissemination” crowd still arrives and the militant “skeptics”, militant atheists, antitheists, apolitical intellectuals, scientisticists, and neopositivists still arrive to call it “conspiracy theory” and “false”. They are all a bunch of sick people and supporters of apoliticism and the status quo, where they can’t see anything outside the official narrative they already call “conspiracy theory” and “false”, even though it’s proven to be true. They are the real flat-Earthers and the real smugglers for apoliticism and the status quo. They are the true neoconservatives and the true defenders of the status quo, the so-called “scientific dissemination” crowd and the militant “skeptics”, militant atheists, antitheists, apolitical intellectuals, scientists, and neopositivists. Bioterrorism, corporate terrorism, popular-cultural terrorism, scientific terrorism, atheistic terrorism, and state terrorism really do exist, and you don’t need to be an intellectual to realize it.”

“We should seriously go with the development of an anti-singularity defense system and of an anti-AI defense system the soon as possible. We still have 10-20 years for do that. And we need to hurry the soon as possible.”

“I love when I have my inspiration moments. I fell so good and I feel so nice… And I feel able to write a lot and think in a lot of things and quotes as well.”

“Postmodernism is not that bad. Postmodernism can be really good. Since postmodernism helped me to understand how everything is a social construction, that we can also have religious thinking and spiritual thinking, and also how much we need of criticism of atheism, antitheism, skepticism, scientism, neopositivism, rationalism, freethought, debunking, evidentialism, secularism, humanism, irreligion, and materialism.”

“I was thinking about writing about a long comment about scientific authoritarianism, scientific totalitarianism, scientific fascism, scientific ingsoc (sciensoc/scientosoc), scientific cultism, scientific fundamentalism, scientific fanaticism, pathological scientism, militant scientism, atheist authoritarianism, atheist totalitarianism, atheist fascism, atheist ingsoc (atheosoc), atheist cultism, atheist fundamentalism, atheist fanaticism, pathological atheism, militant atheism, skeptical authoritarianism, skeptical totalitarianism, skeptical fascism, skeptical ingsoc (skepsoc/skeptsoc/skeptisoc/skepticsoc), skeptical cultism, skeptical fundamentalism, skeptical fanaticism, pathological skepticism, militant skepticism, secular authoritarianism, secular totalitarianism, secular fascism, secular ingsoc (seculsoc/seculasoc/secularsoc), secular cultism, secular fundamentalism, secular fanaticism, pathological secularism, militant secularism, irreligious authoritarianism, irreligious totalitarianism, irreligious fascism, irreligious ingsoc (irrelsoc/irreligisoc), irreligious cultism, irreligious fundamentalism, irreligious fanaticism, pathological irreligion, militant irreligion (irreligious militancy), freethought authoritarianism, freethought totalitarianism, freethought fascism, freethought ingsoc (freethosoc/freethousoc/freethoughtsoc), freethought cultism, freethought fundamentalism, freethought fanaticism, pathological freethought, militant freethought (freethought militancy), evidentialist authoritarianism, evidentialist totalitarianism, evidentialist fascism, evidentialist ingsoc (evisoc/evidentsoc), evidentialist cultism, evidentialist fundamentalism, evidentialist fanaticism, pathological evidentialism, militant evidentialism, anti-pseudoscience authoritarianism, anti-pseudoscience totalitarianism, anti-pseudoscience fascism, anti-pseudoscience ingsoc (antipseudosciencesoc/antipseusciesoc), anti-pseudoscience cultism, anti-pseudoscience fundamentalism, anti-pseudoscience fanaticism, pathological anti-pseudoscience, militant anti-pseudoscience (anti-pseudoscience militancy), ex-religious authoritarianism, ex-religious totalitarianism, ex-religious fascism, ex-religious ingsoc (exrelsoc/exrelisoc/exreligisoc), ex-religious cultism, ex-religious fundamentalism, ex-religious fanaticism, pathological ex-religion, militant ex-religion (ex-religious militancy), antitheist authoritarianism, antitheist totalitarianism, antitheist fascism, antitheist ingsoc (antitheosoc), antitheist cultism, antitheist fundamentalism, antitheist fanaticism, pathological antitheism, militant antitheism, neopositivism, antitheism, freethought, scientific evidentialism, empirical evidentialism, scientific methodicalism (scientific methodism, where the scientific method can determine, proof or disprove anything), and related and how authoritarian, totalitarian, fascist and fundamentalist they are. But I feel I have wrote so much about those things to a level I feel it would be waste of time, and I feel I am already very tired and sick for doing that all the time… It is becoming very tiring and I am getting sick of doing that as well. I think my the quantity of comments and texts I have made, it is enough for someone who thinks as me to continue my work on that."

"Everytime someone say to you "your religion is false", you answer "my religion is true, your religion is true and everyone's religion is true." And for every "hey kids, your religion is false", you say "hey kids, your religion is true, do not listen to militant atheists, atheist zealots and antitheists, they suck and they want to turn everyone into atheists and antitheists." It is simple, not that complicated."

"We must strengthen the left in Russia, Brazil and the whole world! The RSFSR/USSR must come back, just as the URSAL and the World Socialist Republic must be created! We must fight for socialism/communism and the left all over the world! And instead of having state atheism (or state militant atheism), have religious pluralism, state agnosticism, or even state religion! And fight against fascism, Nazism, capitalism, neoliberalism, rightism, libertarianism, anarcho-capitalism, state atheism, militant atheism, neopositivism, and "popular" culture (or bourgeois culture or liberal capitalist culture). Long live the RSFSR/URSS! Long live the URSAL! Long live the World Socialist Republic! Out Zelensky! Out Putin! Out fascism! Out Nazism! Out capitalism! Out neoliberalism! Out state atheism! Out militant atheism! Out neopositivism! Out NATO! Socialism/Communism now! RSFSR/URSS now! URSAL already! World Socialist Republic now!"

LOG IN TO REPLY

Guilherme Monteiro Jr.

April 12, 2022 at 2:07 pm

I would say the meaning of life is to become a species of gods and of highly evolved beings just as how the Anunnaki actually are. Same thing with reaching the same level of being and existence as the Anunnaki and of other highly evolved beings. And also reaching a post-physical level of existence. But humans are really far from that and I feel tired to elaborate this more and I also feel it is unnecesssary to elaborate more than this. Except if you are writing a long article about that as well. And what me and Kasdeya have wrote about that are quite enough for now.

LOG IN TO REPLY

Guilherme Monteiro Jr.

April 13, 2022 at 4:38 am

“For you recover recover connection with Anunnas, give it time and spend more time in the outside world. Ground yourself to the nature. If you want to remember the gods you must feel them all around you. Hold enlil in every breath you take. Feel enki in every drop of water. When you look up at the sky, see the immensity and great power of anu. Feel the smell of flowers, the soft ground, the beautiful green trees. All nature is Ninhursag. They’re all around you. Never left. You just strayed Away. See Nammu in every single atom, everywhere around you flow the waters of life.” – Kasdeya

LOG IN TO REPLY

Guilherme Monteiro Jr.

April 13, 2022 at 5:04 pm

I have had just a memory from my catechism times, where I was around 6-13 years old, and I remember I was very atheist, or better, I was very agnostic, and I always tried to unite the biblical teachings with the scientific teaching, at least subversively, and there was a time I even told that to my mother, and she said I would be excommunicated for doing such heresy, I still remember that very well, and I had some memories from my catechism times. And how much weak atheist and even weak agnostic I used to be during those times, I used to pray and such, but my mind was very weak atheist and weak agnostic, I would say I was literally an agnostic atheist during my childhood and until my 16-17 years old where my spiritual awakening started to happen, and then I met about the Anunnaki and got very angry with them (the whole slavery thing and ancient aliens thing) and then forgot about then, and then I only got fine with them with 20-21 years old when I realized they weren’t and they aren’t as what people like Sitchin, people from r/Anunnaki and for those “Anunnaki” groups on Facebook and Facebook pages say they are. I am feeling good now with what I am right now and I value myself as well. Now I understand very well about the gods and about the Anunnaki as well, and I feel goot in the way I am nowadays, I can also feel the Anunnaki even more than before and I can understand them even more, and I can also understand my mother, at least partially, and I hope she will be able to understand me before she dies… She is already +60 by now… Anyway, I understand that the meaning of life is related to my previous comment about this theme here, “I would say the meaning of life is to become a species of gods and of highly evolved beings just as how the Anunnaki actually are. Same thing with reaching the same level of being and existence as the Anunnaki and of other highly evolved beings. And also reaching a post-physical level of existence. But humans are really far from that and I feel tired to elaborate this more and I also feel it is unnecesssary to elaborate more than this. Except if you are writing a long article about that as well. And what me and Kasdeya have wrote about that are quite enough for now.” And also “For you recover recover connection with Anunnas, give it time and spend more time in the outside world. Ground yourself to the nature. If you want to remember the gods you must feel them all around you. Hold enlil in every breath you take. Feel enki in every drop of water. When you look up at the sky, see the immensity and great power of anu. Feel the smell of flowers, the soft ground, the beautiful green trees. All nature is Ninhursag. They're all around you. Never left. You just strayed Away. See Nammu in every single atom, everywhere around you flow the waters of life." – Kasdeya, I think it sasy everything already, the gods are everywhere and right here and right now. And yes, we should counter militant atheism, antitheism, skepticism, scientism and neopositivism as well. And I feel very good being this way. And yes, I think in a lot of things and I write very fast on the same way I think very fast, despite I would like if I was able to think more and to write books, but I am happy the way I am right now. And I thank a lot to my mother, my current friends and to the Anunnaki gods for what I am right now and that I am happy being the way I am nowadays, and I hope I will be able to live for some more years and that I will be able to accomplish my dreams and that I will get the recognition, the support and the help I deserve and need… And I feel very happy that the Anunnaki didn't abandoned me and that they still are with me as I can feel them with me right here and right now, and it makes me feel really good and I hope I will be able to stay like that for the next weeks, months and years to come.

LOG IN TO REPLY

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